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Middle Eastern Americans & LGBT Rights.

The Collision Between Historically Conservative Values and Contemporary Liberal Political Preferences

Key Words:

- LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) Community
- Homosexuality
- Political Orientation
- Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
- Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
- Muslim's for Progressive Values (MPV)

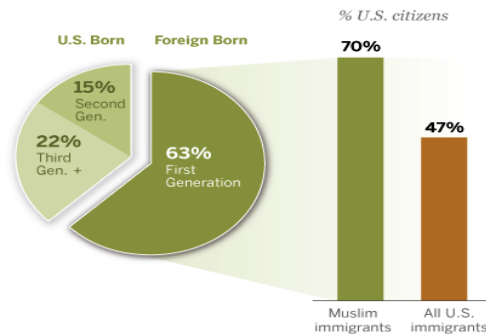
Description: Although the Muslim American Community maintains conservative values with respect to sexuality, specifically homosexuality, as a group they strongly identify with the Democratic Party. Moreover, recent polls indicate that this fundamental rejection of homosexuality may be changing with younger generations.

Key Points:

1. The Muslim American population in the United States is extremely diverse and includes immigrants from more than 70 nations.
2. A 2011 Pew Poll reveals that the political participation of the Muslim American community is lower than that of the general public; however, this group shares several ideological preferences.
3. Furthermore, this poll illustrates that the political preferences of this group match those of the general public.
4. The Muslim American Community has a strong allegiance to the Democratic Party; however, their historical views regarding sexuality, particularly homosexuality, contradict their generally liberal beliefs.
5. Although many Muslim Americans maintain traditional values and conservative beliefs with respect to sex and marriage, there appears to be a slight shift in the community's beliefs regarding homosexuality.

Muslim Americans: Who They Are

A 63% majority of Muslim Americans are first-generation immigrants to the U.S., with 45% having arrived in the U.S. since 1990.



About **FOUR OUT OF EVERY TEN** Muslim immigrants to the U.S. are from the Middle East-North Africa region.



However, **PAKISTAN** is the country where the largest share (14%) of U.S. Muslim immigrants were born.

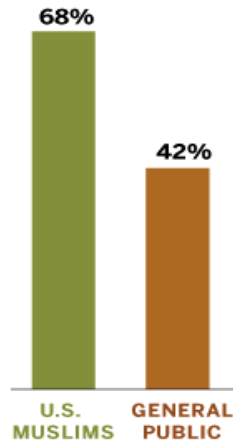
Interestingly, 70% of Muslim Americans born outside the U.S. are U.S. citizens, which is a much higher rate of citizenship than among the broader immigrant population in the U.S.

<http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/a-portrait-of-muslim-americans/>
Issue Brief:

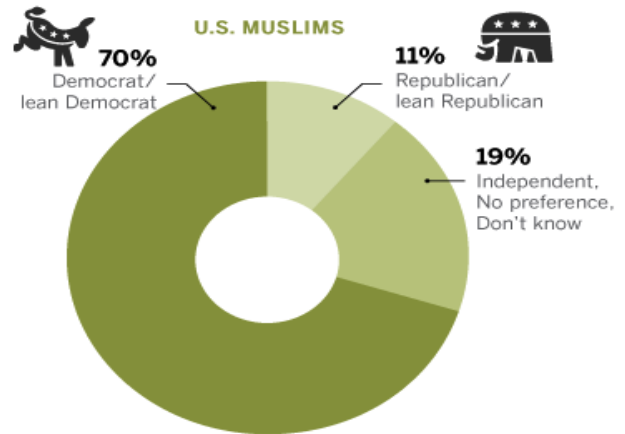
In 2011 the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press partnered with the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life to conduct a study in an attempt to better understand the political nature of the Muslim American population. The results of this study were released with an accompanying report on August 30, 2011. The study highlights a lack of political participation and identifies relatively strong group preferences. Muslim Americans, for example, have liberal attitudes on a number of current political issues and accordingly “[m]ost Muslim Americans (70%) either identify as Democrats (46%) or lean toward the Democratic Party (24%); just 11% identify with the Republican Party or lean toward the GOP (Kohut & Lugo).” Therefore, although the population presents unique difficulties in terms of group analysis this poll indicates that as a group Muslim Americans have shared ideological beliefs, including a clear tendency to support liberal policies.

Muslim Americans have liberal attitudes on the size of government ...

% who say they prefer a bigger government with more services



... and most either identify as Democrats or lean toward the Democratic Party.



Nearly half (48%) of U.S. Muslims say they feel that the GOP is **unfriendly** toward them. By contrast, just 7% say the Democratic Party is unfriendly toward Muslim Americans.

<http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/a-portrait-of-muslim-americans/>

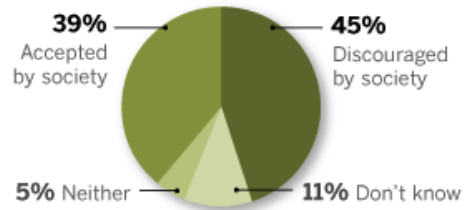
While the Pew study describes a strong allegiance between the Muslim American

community and the Democratic Party, this liberal trend is contradicted by ingrained opinions regarding homosexuality. The Muslim American population is divided with respect to issues regarding homosexuality, with 45% of the population believing that society should accept homosexuality and 45% maintaining that homosexuality should be discouraged by society. These numbers are slightly more conservative than the national averages with the “general public, by a 58% to 33% margin, says that homosexuality should be accepted (Kohut & Lugo).” However, past polls illustrate that there has been an increasing shift towards the acceptance of homosexuality, which mirrors the growing acceptance of individuals throughout the nation. Therefore, although the population presents unique difficulties in terms of group analysis this poll confirms that as a group Muslim Americans have shared ideological beliefs. Moreover, although Muslim-Americans tend to have a liberal ideology and vote for the Democratic Party their

opinions regarding homosexuality are somewhat more conservative than the rest of the nation.

Muslim Americans are not especially liberal when it comes to the societal acceptability of homosexuality. They are split on this issue.

% who say that homosexuality should be ... ►



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“Muslim scholars agree - based on what has been revealed in the Qur'an and what has been authenticated in the Prophetic Sunnah - that homosexual behavior (gayness and lesbianism) is prohibited because it is an assault on the humanity of a person, destruction of the family, and a clash with the aims of the Lawgiver, one of which is the establishment of sexual instincts between males and females so as to encourage the institution of marriage (Rayside, David).” This opinion is bolstered by several prominent Muslim-American organizations such as the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). For example, the official position of the Muslim Women’s League (MWL), a group with strong ties to MPAC is that “[h]uman beings are capable of many forms of sexual expression, orientation and identification. The potential for behavior, such as homosexuality, does not mean that its practice is lawful in the eyes of God. Therefore, individuals are expected to control themselves and not act on their desires if such action is contrary to the guidelines of Islam. Homosexuality, like other forms of sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage, is thus prohibited (An Islamic Perspective on Sexuality, 1999). Furthermore, MWL argues that homosexuality is a crime against the state and therefore advocates civil punishment. Furthermore, they warn that individuals who violate this law “will deal with

the consequences of their behavior in this life and will be accountable to God on the Day of Judgment (An Islamic Perspective on Sexuality, 1999).” Although the core tenants of established religious groups reject homosexuality, their beliefs highlight a small change. For example, “MPAC remains reluctant to confront moral or religious condemnation of homosexual practice and same-sex relationships, but is open to more progressive statements when questions of homophobic violence and human rights are at stake (Rayside, David).”

Furthermore, in addition to the shift of the religious establishment several new, progressive groups have recently arisen. Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) is an example of such an organization. Pamela Taylor and Zuriani Zonneveld founded MPV in 2007 with the mission to create “a future where Islam is understood as a source of dignity, justice, compassion and love for all humanity and the world (MPV.com).” However, although particular groups envision a more tolerant society and the Pew Poll indicates a growing acceptance of homosexuality.

Works Cited

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Useful Websites:

- Council on American-Islamic Relations: <http://www.cair.com>



- Muslim Women's League: <http://www.mwlusa.org>
- Muslim's for Progressive values: <http://mpvusa.org>



- The Muslim Public Affairs Council: <http://www.mpac.org>

